

## Tradition of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics and its Historical Status in Southeast Asia\*

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### Introduction

Glazing technique is one of the technology of which Myanmar has a long and rich tradition. Since glazing technology is an important portion of the History of Myanmar Science I pay a great attention and invest most of my time in pursuing this subject in research work on the History of Myanmar Science. As the historic treasure of glazed ceramics technology was being buried by our ancestors our endeavour to recover it was now rewarded and at present we are rightfully inherited the respectable status in the glazed ceramics history of Southeast Asia. In this presentation, I would like to refer to an account on the epic emergence of the Myanmar Glazed Ceramics tradition in the arena of the Southeast Asia Glazed Ceramics history.

### Historic deed

The historical evidence for the tradition of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics could be traced as far back as 7<sup>th</sup> century AD and some selected examples may be listed chronologically as follows:-

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Century :

A fragmentary Sanskrit inscription found at Srikshetra refers to **Kalaśapura (City of pots)** at least four times, in a manner inferring that it was conquered or entered into a special relationship with the Pyu around the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The king of Kalaśapura is called 'Śri Parameśvara' about four times, and also 'Śri Paramadeva' about twice. [Aung Thaw 1972].

It is possible that the technique of glazing was introduced into Myanmar during this period. [Pamela Gutman, 1978]

#### 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Centuries:

A Tang dynasty (618-907) Chinese chronicle **Man Shu** (in the chapter "Southern Barbarians") mentioned that "*The circular wall of his (the Pyu King) city is built of greenish glazed tiles (bricks), and is 160 li. It has twelve gates and there are pagodas at each four corners.... Their house tiles are of lead and zinc.... They have a hundred monasteries with bricks of vitreous ware, embellished with gold and silver, vermillion, gray colours and red kino*". [Taw Sein Ko, 1909-10].

I-tsing and Huiyen Thsang (or Yuan Chwang), the 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese pilgrims, mentioned Shih-li-chá -to-lo (Pyu Kingdom being identified as Srikshetra or more possibly old Bagan (Tampavati)) where the inhabitants barter earthenware jars as well as **glazed ware**. [Luce 1961; Noel Singer 1990; Virginia Di Crocco 1990].

From Fan Choh's work on the Southern Barbarians: "*the P'iao State (i.e. Capital) is 75 journeys south of Zung-chaing, and communications with it were opened by Koh-Lo-fêng. In this state they use greenish bricks to make the city-wall, which is one day's a journey in circuit*". The date of Koh-Lo-fêng is 748-779 A.D. [Temple 1894]

From Srikshetra area only two specimens of glazed ware have been reported, one is a four inch high metal Buddha

image coated with a translucent green glaze [Noel Singer 1990] and the other a small greyish green jar [Pamela Gutman 1978]. However no evidence of glazed bricks were found on the circular wall of Sirkshetra ever being excavated.

Very important existing evidence at Bagan is the **Ngakwenadaung pagoda** (believed to be from the 9<sup>th</sup> century) where the upper portion of its whole body is inlaid and decorated by various types and shapes of **glazed bricks**.

#### 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Glazed plaques were found in Kyaikpun pagoda near Bago and their date was estimated to be 10<sup>th</sup> century. [Temple 1894].

There are at least twenty two edifices (pagoda, temple, zedi) in Bagan between 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries period which bear **glazed decoration** mostly in the form of bricks, plaques and tiles. Glazing technique not only on the earthenware but also on sandstone and metal surface were practiced.

##### Sandstone-glazed:

Shwezigon zedi (11<sup>th</sup> C.), Htilominlo temple (13<sup>th</sup> C.), Narathihapate temple (13<sup>th</sup> C.), Temple behind Bulethee (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Gayoe-cho temple (12<sup>th</sup> C.) and Temple no. 1756 (South west of Alopeyi temple) (12<sup>th</sup> C.).

##### Earthen-glazed:

Ratanagara (north of Mahabodi temple) (11<sup>th</sup> C.), Ananda temple (11<sup>th</sup> C.), Shwesandaw zedi (11<sup>th</sup> C.), Nagayon temple (11<sup>th</sup> C.), Sint zedi (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Sularmani temple (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Dhamayazaka zedi (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Shwegugyi temple (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Kandawpalin temple (12<sup>th</sup> C.), encased pagoda (near Lokaok-shaung) (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Soemngyi zedi (12<sup>th</sup> C.), YadanarManaung zedi (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Sinpya temple (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Taungtawet temple (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Sintquet zedi (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Mingalar zedi (13<sup>th</sup> C.), [Aung Kyaing, 1999].

Archaeological Department of Myanmar excavated four ancient mounds at Nwatale Ywahoung (old village) near Nga-Oo village of Momake forest circle in Mogoke township northern Shan in April 1948 and discovered green glazed wares (mostly jars) of various sizes along with some earthen votive tablets and Chinese blue-and-white wares from the relic-chamber of the old received pagoda. One of the votive tablets bears the inscription in Pali the name of King Aniruddha (1044-1077). Accordingly the Archaeology Department estimated the date to be early 11<sup>th</sup> century. [Archaeological Survey Burma 1950].

A fragment of a green-glazed votive tablet bearing an image of Buddha with an inscription containing the name of Aniruddha (1044-1077) could be found at the Bagan Museum. This glazed tablet may be dated to be mid-11<sup>th</sup> century. [DeCrocco 1990].

A glazed earthenware pot discovered in the relic-chamber of a stupa built by Aniruddha (1044-1077) at Bagan is iden-

tical to one excavated at Twanté. At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1291) when the Bagan court fled south to Tala (Twanté) before the advance of the Mongols, Queen Acaw ordered the Cakyap potters of the Tala circle to supply pots. [Luce 1969-70; Pamela Gutman 1978].

In Bagan Museum, a crowned Buddha image glazed with lead-tin glaze with opaque green colour is on display which could be dated early 13<sup>th</sup> century [DeCrocco 1990].

In the ink inscription (စေတီ) of 1194 AD (556 ME) written on the stucco of the entrance passage wall of Alopeyi temple (south of Wetkyiinn village) the word 'ခွံ' (sint or glaze) can be found<sup>+</sup> mentioning about the Sint Pahto (စင်ပုဆိပ်) which is the existing pagoda (just behind the Alopeyi temple) where the whole body of its upper portion is inlaid with glazed bricks.

#### 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries

When Kin Pagoda (also known as Aung Minglar Zedi) of Pyay (Prome) was renovated in 1951, glazed tobacco pipes and glazed jars were discovered from the relic-chamber and these glazed wares were dated by the Archaeology Department of Burma (Myanmar) to be early 14<sup>th</sup> century [Archaeological Survey Burma 1952].

In 1350, Ibn Batuta (Mohammedan trader) mentioned "Then the Princess made me a present consisting of ..... and four *Martaban*, or huge jars, filled with pepper, citron, and mango, all prepared with salt, as for a sea-voyage." [Hobson-Jobson, 1903].

A small slightly glazed and heavily potted jar bearing an inscription in Myanmar date 724 (i.e. AD 1362) was discovered at Laputkala village in Myaung Mya Myohoung where various ancient kilns were located. [Tyn 1990, Guy 1989].

The 14<sup>th</sup> century Chinese chronicle, the *Sung Shih*, records Chinese traders transporting ceramics overland from Yunnan to the town of Bhamo in Upper Myanmar for river transport to Martaban. Chinese celadon acquired the name "martabani" for a time by virtue of travelling this route. At present celadon wares are still called "martabani" in the Middle East [Volker 1954; Adhyatman 1985; Guy 1989].

In 1475 the King Dhammaceti (1460-1492) despatched a religious mission to Sri Lanka (Cylon) with large amount of articles for presenting to the Mahâtheras of Sihladîpa (Cylon). Among these articles there was a reddish (rubby) coloured **glazed jar**<sup>\*</sup> (ကမ္မဇာရီ-စင်အိုး) for storing the Buddha-relic and accordingly it was mentioned in the Kalyâni Inscriptions of Bago (Pegu) erected by the King Dhammaceti in 1476 AD. [Ahcara 1938; Taw Sein Ko 1895].

At Shwegugyi pagoda complex built in 1476 by the King Dhammaceti more than a thousand of tin opicified lead glazed plaques were inlaid. [Stadtner 1999]

In 1516, Duarte Barbosa (Portuguese visitor to Lower Myanmar) wrote that "In this town of Martaban are made very large and beautiful porcelain vases, and some of **glazed earthenware** of a black colour, which are highly valued among the Moores, and they export them as merchandize" [Hobson-Jobson 1903; Stanley 1966].

In 1598, John Huyghen van Lanschoten described "In

this towne (Martaban) many of the great earthen pots are made, which in India are called *Martananas*, and many of them carried throughout all India, of all sortes both small and great; some are so great that they will hold full two pipes\* of water. The cause why so many are brought into India is for that they vse them in every house, and in their shippes insteede of caskes" [Burnell 1885; Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In 1609, De Morga described "In this island of Luzan particularly in the provinces of Manila, Pampanga, Pangasinan, and Ylocos, there are to be found among the natives, some large jars of very ancient earthenware, of a dark colour, and not very sightly, some of them of a middle size, and others smaller, with marks and seals, and they can give no account from whence they got them, nor at what period: for now none are brought, nor are they made in the islands. The Japanese seek for them and value them, because they have found out that the root of a herb, which they call *cha* (tea!), and which is drink hot, as a great dainty and a medicine, among the kings and lords of Japan, does not keep or last, except in these jars". These jars were known as tibers or gusih and valued among the Dayaks of Borneo. [De Morga 1609; Temple 1894].

In 1610, Francois Pyrard de Laval noted "....the most beautiful, best **glazed** and made **jars** I have seen anywhere. There are some that hold as much as a pipe, or more. They are made in the Kingdom of Martaban, from where they are brought and from where they take their name throughout India"<sup>\*</sup> [Pyrard de Laval 1679; Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In 1615 some account of Martaban jar was mentioned in a Dictionary in Latin (*Du Jarric, Thesaurus Rer. Indic. ptiii. 389*) stating that "....*vasa figulina quae vulgo Martabani dicuntur per Indian nota sunt. Per Orientem omnem, quin et Lusitaniam, horum est usus*". This indicates the early spread of Martaban jar to Portugal and also to the Arabs. [Temple 1894; Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In Dhamayarthi pyo (ဓမ္မရာသီပျို့) composed by Shin Kumaryakathapha of Pakhangyi in 1625 during the reign of Anaukpet Lun Min (1605-1628) the craft of pottery (including glazing) was mentioned<sup>†</sup> as ဝန်းခတ် (Pan-khat) as the traditional arts and crafts of Myanmar.

During 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in Mrauk-U at Rakhine, colourful glazed tiles were used to decorate some religious edifices. At the Htupayama pagoda coeval with Mrauk-U founded in 1430 a row of glazed rosette-tiles having various colours of turquoise, yellow and white were decorated on the enclosure wall. The 16<sup>th</sup> century pagodas of Yadanabone, Shitthaung...etc were also inlaid with glazed plaques and tiles with floral designs of which some of these shards are kept at the Sittwe museum. King Narapati-gyi (1638-45) built a library (pitaka-taik) to house the scared texts of pitaka where leaf shaped glazed tiles of green, red, blue, yellow and white were inlaid on the walls. Also decorated glazed tablets arranged as a band of colourful rosettes could be seen on the enclosure wall of the Laungbonpyauk<sup>\*</sup> pagoda. The 18<sup>th</sup> century shrine of Kado-thein in Laung-gyet district was paved with brown, blue and green glazed tiles. [Fraser-Lu 1994; Than Tun 1972].

+ Line 6: ခသော (အ) ..... ထုပ်ရှပ်သက်သိယ့်မူခသော ..... စင်ပုဆိပ် တွင်

\* မသောရဂလ္လ သဒ္ဓိယ ကမ္မဇာရီ ပရိသတ်ဓာတုမန္တိရဉ္စ (မသောရဂလ္လ=ပတ္တမြားပြောက်။ သဒ္ဓိယ=တူသည်။ ကမ္မဇာရီ=စင်အိုး။ ပရိ=ထက်ဝန်း ကျင့်။ သင်္ခတ်=ပြုပြင်စီရင်။ ဓာတု=ဓာတ်တော်။ မန္တိရ=အိမ်။ ဉ္စ=တစ်ခု)

\* 1 pipe= 2 hogsheds = 105 gallons approximately

\* Translation from the original French text.

† Extract from Dhamayarthi Pyo "....ထူးဆန်းရုပ်ထူး၊ ပန်းပုခေါ်မည်၊ ရေးသည်ပန်းချီ၊ လုံးညီမုတ်၊ ပန်းပွတ်အဖြာ၊ ပူတာလုပ်ညွှား၊ ပန်းခတ်များက၊ ..... "

A memorandum of 1664 preserved in the Public Record Office, London, and entitled "The Trade of India as 'tis now managed by the English Company of Merchants trading in some parts of it is very invallid in comparison of what is now drove by our neighbour nation the Dutch..... many sorts of clothing are sent into Pegu, a Port in yt Bay [Bangala] which returns rubies and readie money, the coine or current money of the place, allsoe **Martanas Jarres**". [Temple 1894].

In 1673, Fryer mentioned that " ...to that end offer Rice, Oyl, and Cocoe-Nuts in thick Grove, where they piled an huge Heap of long Jars like **Mortivans**". [Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In 1676 Schouten stated that "apart from foodstuffs, the Peguans imported gold, rubies, musk, tin, and **Martaban jars** into Malacca, and that they exchanged these articles for cloth, sandalwood, pepper, cloves, silks, porcelain and iron pans". [Schouten 1676; Meilink-Roselofs. 1962]

In 1688 Dampier explained that "They took it out of the cask, and put it into earthen Jars that held about eight Barrels apiece. These they call **Montaban Jars**, from a town of that name in Pegu, whence they are brought, and carried all over India." [Hobson-Jobson 1903]

In 1690, Geo. Everard Rumphius, Dutch botanist, remarked "There are these large and heavy jars that are made in parts of the **Martaban** (and Siam) and which are found all over India where they are used to conserve various liquids" [Rumphius 1741, Hobson-Jobson 1903].

There are four edifices (pagoda, temple, zedi) in Bagan built in about 17<sup>th</sup> century which have glazed decoration and could be listed as: Thayetkyin temple (near the Museum), Phut zedi, Hman pagoda (near Kuthinaryone of Myinkaba village), Hman pagoda (east of Dhamayazaka).

#### 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries

In 1711, Lockyer described "... Pegu, Quedah, Jahore and all their own Coasts, whence they are plentifully supply'd with several Necessarys, they otherwise must want; As Ivory, Beeswax **Mortivan** and small Jars, Pepper, & C." [Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In 1726 Valentijn reported that "The goods exported hitherward (from Pegu) are...**glazed pots** (called **Martavans** after the district where they properly belong), both large and little." [Hobson Jobson 1903]

In 1727 Alexander Hamilton recorded "Martavan was one of the most flourishing Towns for Trade in the East.....They make earthen Ware there still, and **glaze** them with Lead-ore. I have seen some Jars made there could contain two Hogsheads of Liquor" [Hobson-Jobson 1903, Foster 1930]

In 1740, Wheeler narrated that "The Pay Master is likewise ordered...to look out for all the **Pegu Jars** in Town, or other vessels proper for keeping water". [Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In 1757 the King Aloungpaya (1752-1760) conquered Pegu (Bago) and brought about 5000 prisoners of war back to the Upper Myanmar. The potters from these prisoners were allowed by decree to manufacture glazed earthenware at Kyaukmyaung region near Shwebo. The production of glazed earthenware continued from that period till now in this area. [Than Tun 1973].

In Hunter's "Account of Pegu", 1785 which told that "a foreigner may marry one of the natives, on which occasion he pays a stipulated sum to her parents; but, if he leaves the

country, he is not permitted to carry his wife along with him. So strict is the law in this particular, and so impossible it is to obtain a dispensation from it, that some men, who have had a great affection for their wives, have been obliged, on their departure, to carry them away secret by in (**Martaban**) jars which were supposed to be filled with water" [Temple 1894].

In 1783 A.D. (1145 M.E.) "Sittan of 32 Towns of Muttuma (Martaban)" it was recorded that every year on the month of Wakaung (August) the tributes were sent to the King Bodawpaya (1782-1819) consisting of the following glazed earthenware: Kyarswé Yo (Lotus fang jam) in a **glazed jar** (ကြာဇွယ်ယို ဝ စွဲဆိုးနွဲ့), 100 **glazed** goglets or bottles (စွဲတကောင်းအင် ၁၀၀), 100 **glazed** dishes (စွဲပန်းကန်ငယ် ၁၀၀), 100 **glazed** spittoons (စွဲထွေးအင် ၁၀၀) and 200 **glazed** plates (စွဲပန်းကန်ပြား). [Aye Kyaw 1970]

For Mingun Pahto-taw-gyi (pagoda) built in the period 1792 to 1812 by the King Bodawpaya (1782-1819) more than a thousand of glazed plaques (based on the knowledge of previous plaques in Ananda Temple) were manufactured to be laid in the two upper terraces of the pagoda. Although the plaques were not actually inserted in the Mingun pagoda some Mingun-plaques are still existing for evidence in the Archaeological Department of Myanmar. [Stadtner 1998].

In 1820 Baillie Fraser found imitations of the **Pegu (Martaban) Jar** manufactured in Arabia (Oman) and called Martaban. [Temple 1894; Hobson-Jobson 1903].

In 1851 an exhibition was held in London and **Martaban (Pegu) jars** were shown at the Great Empire Exhibition. In the Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition it mentioned "Two large **Pegu Jars** from Moulmein"; "Assortment of **Pegu Jars** as used in the Honourable Company's Dispensary at Calcutta" [Hobson-Jobson 1903; Than Tun 1972].

In 1852 Mr.P.Brown's Zillah Dictionary indicated that "**Martaban**, name of a place in Pegu: a black jar in which rice is imported from (sic) thence." And also in Brown's 1854 Dictionary of the Mixed Dialects and Foreign Words used in Telugu, it stated that "**Martaban**, a black Pegu jar; so called because imported from Martaban." [Temple 1895].

Yule, in 1855, described his visit to Amarapura that "Earthenware on a very large scale, I saw used for capping the posts of the Lower platforms in monasteries. These caps were upwards of two feet in diameter, ornamented with well formed bas-reliefs of flowers and figures and covered with a good brown **glaze**". Yule also observed the **glazed** sandstone decoration on the basement of the Mahatuhlutbonkyaw monastery. [Yule 1858].

In 1869 Lockwood Kipling observed "...while passing through Delhi purchased a number of jars and took them to the London Exhibition of 1870, where this line texture of glaze, a rough duck-egg like coating, was admired by connoisseurs, notably by the late Mr. Henery Fortuny, a celebrated Spanish painter then in England. One of the articles, by the way, happened to be marked **Martaban**, the native name for the jar, and was afterwards described on a museum label as coming from Martaban, a port on Burmese (Myanmar) coast. This curious story has double interest in that it proves the comparative antiquity of the Burmese ceramic art and the very modern character of the application of the India potter's skill to domestic purposes. There would seem little doubt that the **Martabans** sold in India a century ago were entirely imported from Burma and were distributed as regular articles of trade even in such remote

+ Rakhine word "Laungbon=rice dish, pyauk=decorative scroll"

□ Translation from the original Dutch text.

*inland towns as Delhi. It is said that prisoners of war have been smuggled out of the country in some of these jars; if one regards their size one can quite believe it is possible.*" [Morris 1918].

Two large martaban jars with identical incised inscriptions of donated date (i.e. fullmoon day of Tabotwe 1231 ME or **15<sup>th</sup> February 1870 AD**) and donors' names (Maung Thaya and Ma Khar) in Myanmar script were recently found separately in each different monastery at Yin Nyein village about 20 miles north of Muttama (Martaban) town. These two jars were manufactured at the same period about 130 years ago in the same kiln-site possibly within the Muttama region. [Tyn 2001]

In 1873, Albert Jacquemart suspected that early celadon may have been manufactured near the port of Martaban because he noticed that the Arabic word for celadon was "Martabani". This information instigated Sir Ernest Satow, British representative in Bangkok in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to research for celadons in Thailand in 1885. [Jacquemart 1873, Brown 1988].

In 1873, U Po, K.S.M., retired Extra Assistance Commissioner told that when he was Township Officer of Twante, he discovered traces of porcelain kilns in its neighbourhood. [Taw Sein Ko 1895].

In 1880 Bell reported in his Report on the Maldives that "he saw some large earthenware jars at Malé, some about two feet high, called *rumba*, and others large and barral shape, called *mátabán*". [Temple 1895].

Spearman in 1880 mentioned the ornamental glazed earthenwares manufactured in Pathein such as brown-glazed pedestal pagoda vases, hour-glass open-work pedestal etc. And he also mentioned that there were ancient glazed ware kilns in Ahsè village of Kyauktan township, Thanhlyin. Ahsè is a Mon word having a meaning 'glazed jar'. [Spearman 1880].

In 1893 Temple reported that glazed plaques quite similar to those of Shwegugyi ones were found in the ruined base of an old pagoda outside the south-west bastion of the old fort of Syrian (Thanhlyin). He pointed out that "the Great Kyaikkauk Pagoda near Syrian is similarly "glazed" (i.e. silica glaze over lead plaster). He also had the knowledge of the glazed plaques from Seagontawgyi pagoda of Sagaing that the plaques depict about the Jataka with inscription in Myanmar and numbered. The Hti(စ်) and the upper rings (မောင်းရံရံ) of the Shwesayan Pagoda at Thaton was covered with **glazed ware** in several colours and locally it called enamelled pagoda. [Temple 1894]

#### Interest of the historians

The above evidence clearly delineate that Myanmar has long and rich tradition of Glazed Ceramics. However, most of the Southeast Asian glazed ceramics historians were less enthusiastic to include Myanmar into their scholastic endeavour not earlier than 1984 (the importance of this date will be explained shortly) possibly due to the scarcity of production sites i.e. ancient kiln-sites of glazed ware or the scarcity of published materials on the history of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics. This presumption seems to be plausible if one examines some comments of the scholars which would duely quoted as follows:-

#### Pamela Gutman 1978

"The study of Burmese (Myanamar) pottery is an almost virgin field, and the role of Burma (Myanmar) in the pottery trade of East and Southeast Asia has hitherto been neglected" [Pamela Gutman, 1978].

#### Virginia M. Di Crocco and Doris Schulz 1985

*It has been thought in the past that the flow of ceramic wares was one way bringing goods from China, Viet Nam and Thailand through the passes in Northwest Thailand to Martaban*

*(Myanamar) and points abroad.*

#### Sumarah Adhyatman 1985

*Nothing has been published on Burmese (Myanmar) ceramics although the name Martaban, an ancient port in Southern Burma (Myanmar) has let itself to a group of large dark glazed earthenware and stoneware jars.--- we would like to note that the study of early Burmese (Myanmar) ceramics and kiln-sites would greatly contribute to the knowledge of Southeast Asian ceramics and the ceramic trade between Burma (Myanmar) and Southeast Asian countries.*

#### John C. Shaw 1987

*Until as recently as ten years ago there was little interest in Thai ceramics and even less in those of Burma (Myanmar) and the Khmer empire....Burma was a ceramic blank until 1984 when hitherto unknown wares were unearthed from the Tak burial sites along the Burmese border.*

#### Roxanna Brown 1988

*Until very recently, Burma (Myanmar) was thought to be quite devoid of old glazed ceramics even though there was physical evident of modern manufacture, literary evidence of ancient production, and a long tradition in Asia calling large storage jars 'martabans'*

#### John Guy 1989

*Burma (Myanmar) is not traditionally associated with glazed ceramic production and yet there is evidence, both archaeological and textual, of a tradition existing in Burma (Myanmar) from at least the ninth century.*

#### Don Hein, Mike Barbetti and Peter Graye 1989

*"In the emerging history of Southeast Asian ceramics Burma(Myanmar) has long appeared as a blank zone with little confirmed historical production, and apart from the famous center at Martaban, an undefined involvement in trade.---Yet, in comparison with other countries of the region, little is known about Burmese (Myanmar) ceramics; there is no comprehensive typology and virtually nothing is known about historical production".*

#### Noel F. Singer 1990

*"...the ceramic history of the country (Myanmar) which was thought, until now, to be mediocre compared to those of its neighbours. Surprises may yet be in store."*

#### Sylvia Fraser-Lu 1994

*"... there is an urgent need for archaeologists and ceramic historians to investigate thoroughly the activities of all known, both past and present, to gauge the scope and sequence of Burma's (Myanamar) unique ceramic traditions, and to assess their role in the history and trade of the region."*

#### Don Hein, 1996

*".... very little was known about ceramic production in Myanmar even though a few historical references and some material evidence existed to suggest that Myanmar made important contributions to the development of glazed ceramic art and technology in Southeast Asia."*

*" Most books illustrating the production sites of Southeast Asia showed Myanmar (if include at all) as an area largely devoid of activity. Consequently, there has been an impression that not much importance to the story of Southeast Asian ceramics occurred in Myanmar...."*

### Myanmar Ceramics in the Annals of Southeast Asia

The validity of above comments could be observed in the historical treatises specially focused on the Southeast Asian ceramics. The earliest treatises (before 1984) contributed by

Chuta Ito and Yositaro (1937) (on Sino-Siamese, Sino-Annamese and Chinese ceramics),

Okuda Seiichi (1954) (on Annamese),

Lefebvre d'Argencé (1958) (in Vietnamese),

Charles Nelson Spinks (1965, 1971, 1978) (on Thai)

William Willetts (1971) (on Thai, Khmer and Vietnamese) and

Roxanna Brown (1977) (on Thai, Khmer and Vietnamese ceramics)

did not include Myanmar; even William Willetts who was the founding president of the South-East Asian Ceramics Society and devoted historian anxious to unveil the history of ceramics of the Southeast Asian countries.

Although Roxanna Brown's book (which was based on her thesis submitted for a Master's degree under the supervision of William Willetts to the University of Singapore in November 1973) is a pioneering work and regarded as mandatory and a classic reference. She also missed Myanmar portion in the first edition published in 1977. With a little self-reproof "...rereading my book, I realized how little we knew even ten years ago...." from the author, Roxanna Brown's book was completely rewritten and published as second edition in 1988 including an additional chapter on Burmese (Myanmar) ceramics.

The two treatises on Myanmar ceramics written by Myanmar authors viz. Taw Sein Ko (1895) and Dr. Than Tun (1972) were almost neglected by the foreign historians possibly due to the lack of information on the ancient production sites (i.e. ancient kiln-sites). Only one ancient kiln at Bagan was reported before 1984 (i.e. 1963) which is not to be certain as glazed kiln but rather glass or frit making ones. [Dello Strolago and Kyaw Nyein 1963; Hein 1995, Tyn 1995].

### Why after 1984

The dormant period of international scholars' interest in the history of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics stretched along until 1984 when some mysterious glazed wares popped up in the Tak+ area and also in 1985 in the Omkoi district near Thai-Myanmar border.

These glazed wares are opaque milky white background with decoration in green which had never been seen or unnoticed before by the glazed ceramic lovers. Once these wares appeared in force on the antique market in Bangkok, the beauty of green-and-white<sup>\*</sup> bewitched the dealers and also art historians alike. The popularity of green-and-white glazed ware broke away the Thai boundry and reached to the famous auction house in London and also to the prestigious museums of Japan. At first there was a controversy about the origin of the green-and-white wares. London auction house identified them as Vietnamese. Some presumed that they were from one of the ancient kilns (eg. Kalong) or from an as yet undiscovered kiln site of Thai.

While the beauty of green-and-white ware enhance its value in antique market, the controversy of its origin trigger the enthusiasm of the ceramic historians effecting doubly to the popularity of the green-and-white wares. The former effect brought more Tak-Omkoi like ceramics pieces to the art dealers in Thai

claiming that they had been found from the Tak believing that the name 'Tak' would fetch more money. It took several months to discover that those pieces (i.e. plaques) were coming from Myanmar reportedly from Bago (Pegu). Since the plaques had the same clay and glaze colours firing at a relatively low temperature as the Tak's green-and-white wares the interest of the ceramic historians certainly turn to Myanmar.

At the same time the Japanese (Gakuji Hasebe and his colleague 1986), being passionate lover of Southeast Asian ceramics, brought large amount of green-and-white (also plain white and plain green) wares back home and analysed scientifically for its origin using chemical analysis and also lead isotope ratio comparison methods. Their chemical analysis revealed that the opaque white colour is responsible for the 'tin' in the glaze and the main glaze being lead. Green decoration is due to the copper. From the lead isotope ratio comparison test along with the known sample from Myanmar and Thai (and also lead sample from the mines at Mae Hong Son in Thai and Bawzaing in Myanmar), the Japanese scientists confirmed the unknown green-and-white wares are Myanmar origin. Based on the similarity of glaze and clay to the plaques from Pegu (Bago), they postulated that the green-and-white (also plain white and plain green) wares from Tak were possibly made in Myanmar near Bago in 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Japanese scholars finally commented that: [Hasebe 1996; Yamasaki 1996]

*"From these studies, it is nearly certain that green-and-white wares and plain white and green wares are from Myanmar, but their kiln site remains to be discovered. Once such a kiln is excavated, the date of production, stylistic evolution, total output, and purpose of green-and-white ware will be revealed."*

In Tak-Omkoi not only tin-lead glazed wares but also the celadons<sup>\*</sup> were also found. These celadons are also not identical to those of Thai. They are not Thai nor Vietnam but more closer to Myanmar. [Hasebe 1996]. John C. Shaw asserted to the account of tak-Omkoi finds that:

*"The clay, the glaze and the shapes are different from anything known in Asia and it now seems that we are faced with a Burmese (Myanmar) celadon tradition, as well as a tin glazed tradition, which may date back to the 10<sup>th</sup>."* [Shaw 1987]

Then Tak-Omkoi discovery of green and white wares and celadons in 1984 and its confirmation of Myanmar origin aroused the dormant interest of the ceramic historians; and history of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics becomes suddenly very exciting topic.

### Historians of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics

Before 1984, apart from Myanmar scholars (viz. Taw Sein Ko and Dr. Than Tun), there was a prominent historian, **Dr. Pamela Gutman** of the Australian National University, who cogently argued the existence of a very long history of Myanmar Glazed Ceramics based on the history of Martaban jars. A paper "The Martaban Trade" was presented at a 1978 Symposium on Trade Pottery in East & South-East Asia in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Dr. Gutman reviewed the Glazed Ceramics Tradition of Myanmar starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> century till 18<sup>th</sup> century and refuted the old notion that Myanmar had no history of glazed ceramics. Dr. Gutman was the first who mentioned that Tak (Raheng) and Mesot were on the trade route for ceramics which connected Sawankalok with Muttama (Martaban) before the green and white wares were discovered at Tak.

<sup>\*</sup> Raheng (ရဟင်္ဂ)

<sup>\*</sup> Comparable to the majolica (maiolica) earthenware style having an opaque glaze, usually fired at a comparatively low temperature (900-1050°C)

<sup>\*</sup> Celadon: An artware glaze of a characteristic green colour firing under reducing conditions at high temperature (about 1250°C)

Sumarah Adhyatman, from the Ceramic Society of Indonesia, reported in 1985 on the comprehensive account entitled "Burmese Ceramics" where green-and-white glazed wares were mentioned in the trade ceramics of Indonesia (i.e. north-east Sumatra) where healthy ancient trade relations with Myanmar prevailed.

Virginia M. DiCrocco and Doris Schulz also reported about the green-and-white wares from Tak in great detail and confirmed that they are Myanmar origin probably produced near Pegu(Bago). Because of these green-and-white wares, they put forward a new line of thought that [DiCrocco and Schulz 1985]:

"New thought must be given now to influence from Burma (Myanmar) and the Middle East on Thai ceramics. While the Burmese (Myanmar) Mon wares found in Tak area are of great importance in themselves, they may serve an even more significant role in opening that many new insights into South-east Asian ceramics may be provided by Burma (Myanmar) and the Middle East."

Don Hein, Mike Barbetti and Peter Grave also stated in their review paper on Myanmar ceramics that [Hein et.al. 1988]:

"It was the discovery of many new types of wares in the hilltop burials along the Thai/Burma (Myanmar) border in Tak, Mae Hong Son and Chiangmai Provinces that has raised the matter to greater significance.

.....  
It is suggested that the understanding of Southeast Asian ceramics cannot be fully advanced with out a knowledge of the part played by Burma (Myanmar) which has a history inextricably bound to the remainder of the peninsula and which provided one of the gate-ways to South Asia and the Middle East."

Virginia M. DiCrocco, while emphasising some important hypothesis for identification of the P'iao Kingdom mentioned in the Chinese chronicle (Man Shu) to be possibly old Bagan rather than Srikshestra, she unveiled some interesting account of the history of Myanmar glazed ceramics relating to that of Bagan as such [DiCrocco 1990]:

"... it would appear that lead, alkaline and celadon glazed wares were manufactured in large quantities in Pagan (Bagan)...their origin in the late 11<sup>th</sup>-early 12<sup>th</sup> century and development through the last part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; however, there are indications that the manufacture of lead glazed wares continued through the seventeenth century at least.

Lead glazed wares with tin are usually associated only with the Middle East and with a somewhat later date, and the question of their origin in Burma (Myanmar) is important."

The above story and comments certainly triggered the interest of the historians and then the position of Myanmar in the arena of Southeast Asian Glazed Ceramics history was suddenly became prominent. Now, it could be rightly said that the history of Southeast Asian glazed ceramics would not be complete without the contribution from Myanmar. This overture would authenticate all in good time as a considerable amount of ancient kiln-sites were discovered recently in Myanmar of which the number of discovered kilns approaching to a thousand. [Tyn 1999, Tyn and Rooney 2001, Tyn 2001].

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